

Q: Mr. Caulfield, we're about to do Oral History 408. The following oral history interview was conducted by Captain Marshall Hanson of the Naval Historical Center Detachment, in support of the US Arizona Memorial, at the Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu, on December 6, 2001, at 12:07 p.m. Person being interviewed is John Bernard Caulfield, who was a storekeeper first class, attached to the USS Dobbin while waiting for the USS Patterson on December 7, 1941. Is that correct?

John Bernard Caulfield: That is correct.

Q: For the record, please state your full name, place of birth and birth date.

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. John Bernard Caulfield. Born in Orient, Illinois March 4, 1917. Uh.. I will add this, uh.. John Bernard Caulfield Sr. As I have a son by the same name.

Q: Very good. What did you consider your hometown in 1941?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. my hometown in 1941 would've been Edinburg, Illinois...

Q: Okay.

John Bernard Caulfield: ...E-d-i-n-b-u-r-g...

Q: Thank you.

John Bernard Caulfield: ...Edinburg, Illinois.

Q: What were your parents' names?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. parent's name was John Bernard Caulfield. And my mother's name was Leah Caulfield, la-- maiden name, D-i-e-d-r-i-c-h, Diedrich.

Q: So did you have any siblings, brothers and sisters?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. yes, had one brother, Edward, one sister, Margaret.

Q: Okay. Where did you go to high school?

John Bernard Caulfield: Edinburg High School.

Q: Okay. Where and why did you enlist?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. I had uh.. gone through one year at Illinois State Normal University. And I was somewhat uh.. bored with it, disenchanted with it. And I just wanted to do something else. So I joined the Navy in 1936.

Q: And what month in 1936?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. probably in December of '36. Uh.. a bit vague on that.

Q: Okay. How many years did you have overall in the service?

John Bernard Caulfield: About seven or seven and a half.

Q: And my understanding is although you came in as an enlisted person, you rose up through the ranks, became a chief, then became a warrant and then got a commission.

John Bernard Caulfield: Yes, that's correct.

Q: And when you left the service, what was your highest rank?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. lieutenant JG.

Q: Okay. Now, in 1936, you went through your boot camp. Were you first trained as a storekeeper, or was that something you...

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. I went through the boot camp, and then I went to a school where they trained to be uh.. either a radioman, yeoman or a storekeeper.

Q: Okay. And from that, you came out as a storekeeper.

John Bernard Caulfield: Yes.

Q: Now, you indicated that, in 1941, you were waiting for the USS Patterson.

John Bernard Caulfield: Yes.

Q: What was your first assignment out of A school?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. of g-- again, please.

Q: Where were you assigned when you left A school?

John Bernard Caulfield: Oh, I was assigned to the USS Whitney.

Q: So you went to the Whitney, which was also at Pearl Harbor at the time.

John Bernard Caulfield: Yes.

Q: And how long were you on the Whitney?

John Bernard Caulfield: Oh, possibly uh.. three or four months.

Q: Okay. And did you have a permanent assignment after the Whitney?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. yes, I went to the USS Raleigh.

Q: Raleigh. And how long were you onboard the Raleigh?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. probably couple of years.

Q: Okay. So you were familiar with several ships at Pearl Harbor, weren't you?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. yes.

Q: Okay. Now, you reported aboard the Dobbins waiting to go to the Patterson. Where were you before you went to the Dobbins?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. I was onboard another destroyer. Uh.. I believe it was the Flusser uh.. 368, I believe, the Flusser. And uh.. then I was uh.. I made uh.. at that time, I made storekeeper first class. And I presumably made it a storekeeper first class on the Patterson. So I was assigned to the Patterson, and I checked into the Dobbins waiting for it to come into port.

Q: So basically you were transferred because of a promotion. And the Patterson needed a first class, and they transferred you over there to fill that position. Okay. One question that we're asking is about the time preceding the attack. Now, you first got to Pearl Harbor when?

John Bernard Caulfield: Pearl Harbor? Probably uh.. two years previous to that.

Q: So you'd been in Hawaii for two years. And did you have any impressions? Where were you before being assigned to Pearl Harbor?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. we were aboard uh.. San Diego, uh.. aboard the- the Whitney, transferred to the Raleigh. Then we went on maneuvers, in the uh.. off of Guantanamo Bay, in the Atlantic. We were scheduled to go into New York for re- recreation. And at that time, Hitler made his famous speech. And we were immediately tra- uh.. transferred back to the West Coast, stayed on the West Coast for possibly uh.. a month or two. Then the Raleigh, which was the uh.. lead ship of uh.. several destroyers, probably a

destroyer squadron-- then the whole squadron with the Raleigh moved into uh.. Pearl Harbor.

Q: Okay. Which did you like better, San Diego or Pearl Harbor?

John Bernard Caulfield: San Diego, y-- San Diego.

Q: Any particular reasons why San Diego was more your favorite?

John Bernard Caulfield: A girlfriend.

Q: Girlfriends. We won't tell your wife about that.

John Bernard Caulfield: <laughs>

Q: Okay. Now moving ahead, on December 6th, which is the Saturday just before the attack, do you remember what you were doing?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. yes. Uh.. I wa-- uh.. being on the Dobbin and not having any particular duties, I was uh.. given shore leave. So I stayed over t-- Honolulu overnight on December 6th.

Q: Okay. When you went ashore in Honolulu, we hear a lotta the sailors took the bus or the taxi over to the YMCA and then that became kinda the central point and then they sometimes went off to clubs from there.

John Bernard Caulfield: Y--

Q: Is that what you tended to do?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. yes. Uh.. on several occasions, I would stay overnight at the YMCA.

Q: Were you staying at the YMCA on the night of December 6th?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. no, I was staying at a friend's house.

Q: Okay. So you were ashore.

John Bernard Caulfield: Yes.

Q: Okay. Can you tell me, starting with your first awareness on the morning of December 7th, what you did and how you moved into the environment of the attack that Sunday morning?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. I first heard some uh.. shots. And uh.. my first impression, that the uh.. perhaps the Army was practicing. I was thinking why would they be doing that on Sunday morning. Then I heard a little more. Then finally, uh.. as I found out later, was the Arizona that blew up. At that point, I knew something was drastically wrong. So I walked outside my friend's house. And uh.. some fella said to me, "Are you sailor boy?" I was in my civilian clothes at that time, said, "Yes, I'm a sailor." He says, "Pearl Harbor all blow to hell." So I went back, put on my uniform and immediately w-- returned to Pearl Harbor.

Q: Okay. Whereabouts was your friend's house?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. downtown Honolulu.

Q: Okay. So did you take a taxi to get back to Pearl Harbor?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. yes, I did.

Q: What type of traffic conditions did you find?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. there was uh.. very little traffic, very little traffic, direct route.

Q: So about what time did you get back on base?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. probably- probably an hour and a half after the attack started, hour and a half to two hours.

Q: So you got back on base at about 9:30, ten o'clock?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. about 9:30, probably closer to 10:00. Because the attack was over by time I got there.

Q: Okay. What type of security do you find at the gate when you arrive?

John Bernard Caulfield: There was none.

Q: No security.

John Bernard Caulfield: No security.

Q: Not even a guard?

John Bernard Caulfield: Nothing.

Q: So you just wa--

John Bernard Caulfield: We j- just drove on.

Q: You just walked through, and nobody was there to stop...

John Bernard Caulfield: No.

Q: ...you or direct you.

John Bernard Caulfield: No.

Q: Very interesting.

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. c-- the cabdriver just drove me right onto base.

Q: Okay. Now, the Dobbin, which you were assigned to while awaiting, was reefed out with a group of destroyers out in the harbor.

John Bernard Caulfield: Beg your pardon?

Q: The Dobbin was in a reef of destroyers out in the harbor. They're all tied together, and you're out at one of the mooring buoys.

John Bernard Caulfield: Yes, that's correct.

Q: Did you try and get out to your ship, or did they assign you to go to somewhere else on base?

John Bernard Caulfield: No, I stayed on the Dobbin till the Patterson came in. I think the Patterson-- the Patterson was already in the harbor at that time. And uh.. during the attack, as I understand, the Patterson shot down one shi-- one plane.

Q: Hm.

John Bernard Caulfield: So it's just a matter of getting organized the next day and getting aboard the Patterson.

Q: Now, how did you get from the pier out to the Dobbin?

John Bernard Caulfield: There was a motor launch uh.. that was pretty well beat up, would d- d-- vibrate a lot if you went out, d- d-- been through a lot. There was oil on the water, and it managed to get through the oil. And uh.. then I went aboard the Dobbin.

Q: Okay. As you were going from the fleet landing out to the Dobbin, what was the impression of the scene that you saw?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. my impression of that uh.. I think I was so overwhelmed and awed by uh.. all that had taken place that I do not think I had any particularly impression. Yeah, I think I was too overwhelmed to have more than that type of an impression.

Q: Okay. When you report aboard the Dobbins, did they have you do any special assignments? Did you do any type of work?

John Bernard Caulfield: Y- yes. Uh.. went into their coding room...

Q: Okay.

John Bernard Caulfield: ...uh.. and uh.. did the broke uh.. started breaking down the messages with uh.. had a warrant officer in charge. Uh.. working with him. Uh.. and uh.. one impression I have of that, around dusk, for some reason or other, I happen to be standing out on deck and a plane-- I could see a plane coming in and I saw our own plane from the Enterprise being shot down.

Q: Very sad moment.

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. at that time, I presumed it was an enemy plane, as well as everybody else. As I later found out, the uh.. pilots from the Enterprise was not giving the proper signals that they were friendly.

Q: On that flight, there were only three pilots that survived of which two of their planes crashed. And then the last pilot to come in brought in to Fort Island. And when he actually-- he did a ground loop to stop it since his brakes were out from the combat damage. When he brought it back to the hangar, there was a Marine there with a .50 caliber machine gun that was shooting right at him point-blank.

John Bernard Caulfield: Oh, I was not aware of that.

Q: Well, one of the other pilots from the Enterprise came behind the Marine and hit him with a battle helmet to get him to stop firing the gun. He survived. But it was that scary an environment that you were all facing.

Now, you knew people on the Raleigh and on the Whitney and they also went through the attack. Were any of your friends affected by the events on December 7th?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. not that I know of. Uh.. with the uh.. Patterson-- I went aboard the Patterson. Then within one or two days, we took a load of bombs out to Christmas Island. We took them to Christmas Island, came back to Pearl Harbor. And uh.. captain said to us, at that time, he called all the first class and chiefs, uh.. "Okay. Now we've littered these bombs. Now, we're going out looking for trouble."

Q: Okay. Now, did you have a chance to go ashore Christmas Island? Were you involved...

John Bernard Caulfield: No.

Q: ...at the offload of the bombs?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. no, I was not. That was not part of my job.

Q: So to your knowledge, you were just supporting an air group that was out at Christmas Island?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. correct. And uh.. as I recall, that was getting very near Christmas Day also.

Q: Indeed. Now, you were looking for trouble while on the Patterson. What was the next assignment that the Patterson had?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. we were assigned into uh.. South Pacific uh.. _____ off of Australia.

Q: Okay. So did trouble find you?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. no, n- not a whole lot, not a whole lot. We uh.. were escorting uh.. various ships out of uh.. Brisbane and Sydney. Uh..

one time we were escorting a ship, and I was standing on deck at eight o'clock. And I saw the ship behind us blow into pieces and sink within just a few minutes. Hit by a torpedo from a Japanese submarine of course.

Q: So did that elicit any special emotions or, being in warfare, were you prepared for that type of action?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. I had no particular emotion on it.

Q: Now, you were telling me, in the pre-interview, that the Patterson faced some special action at Savo Island. Can you tell us something about that?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. yes <clears throat>. In the Battle of Savo Island, uh.. we were one of the picket ships that Ralph Talbot was the head of as part of a destroyer. And as I recall, we had one man staying in the wing uh.. bridge at midnight and it was very dark. And he said, "There's something out there." And about that time, uh.. I think we illuminated very briefly and exposed the uh.. the Japanese cruisers, four of them. The Japanese cruisers immediately fired on us and hit our after gun, exploded our ready ammunition. <clears throat> I was in the decoding room, which is dark. And I was decoding a message saying, "Expect the Japanese task force to arrive at 2:00 a.m." Well, that was midnight. They arrived two hours early. So we were not at general quarters nor was any of our other ships in the harbor at general quarters. And that was one horrible mistake not to have been at general quarters. And I put that responsibility on Admiral Crutchley, who was uh.. in the Australia-- about 200 miles remote from our task force, which brings up this point to me, is that none of our servicemen should ever be under any foreign command. If we had uh.. an American admiral there, we would've not lost four cruisers. Our ship, our destroyer, might not have been damaged. On the other hand, we had 16 torpedoes on our destroyer. Eight of them were trained out on the uh.. on the Japanese cruisers. We were hit. And for some reason, the order did not go fire the torpedoes. Our torpedoes were not fired. If they had been fired, probably would've changed the whole course of that battle. 'Cause we would've knocked out two-- at least two of their cruisers. As a result, the Cambria, the Quincy, Vincent, Astoria and Chicago steamed out of the harbor presumably. And so the Japanese uh.. changed their attention from us very fortunately for me. And uh.. they f-- started firing on the cruisers. And they knocked all of those cruisers down because uh.. they had not been notified properly that the Japanese were there with their cruisers. Now, the uh.. Cambria was hit and

sinking. And we went alongside the Cambria, and we took off about, oh, 100 men or more from the Cambria, had them all on our deck at midnight. And uh.. one thing I remember vidaly uh.. vividly is the captain of the Ca- Cambria crying out for water. He had been uh.. stoma-- could've been t-- injured severely. And our uh.. the doctor, whom I was quite friendly with, uh.. said, "I cannot help that man," says, "I'm a pediatrician."

Q: Hm.

John Bernard Caulfield: And uh.. so we had these 100 men on there. They should uh.. cruiser Chicago had ste-- had been hit, and it had steamed away from the action. Well, it turned around and came back in. We saw it coming back in. So we shot its mast off.

Q: <laughs>

John Bernard Caulfield: And then Chicago fired at us and missed us <laughs> fortunately. But-- so we were, at that time, we were tied alongside the Cambria taking these men off and their guns were still firing automatically. But-- so, the only thing we could do, we cut the hausers [ph?] and gave it full speed ahead. So when we finally broke loose, we sli-- tilted, listed severely. Of course, a destroyer will come right back up. So it did come back up. And so uh.. by the time we found out we were fighting our own ship, well, we, course, was fine. And that's part of the story of Savo Island. It could've been saved. Our destroyers uh.. if we had uh.. made the proper attack, we would've saved our cruisers. We could've c-- uh.. changed that battle. The other mistake was our Admiral Crutchley, who did not take really command and have an organization for our battle plan. Now, these are mistakes that we made. The great mistake was uh.. made by Admiral Mikawa in charge of the Japanese cruisers. He had already eliminated all of his opposition. All he had to do was to go back into the harbor. And we had uh.. numerous supply ships with uh.. Marines still onboard them. He could've gone in there and destroyed everything in there. But instead of that, he steamed away. He- he let us uh.. finish to unload our supplies. He permitted us to uh.. to uh.. unload all the remaining Marines. He could've changed the whole uh.. Battle of Guadalcanal had he gone in there and shot all those transports down, but he did not do it. Admiral Mikawa's mistake.

Q: There were many lessons learned early in the war. Is this your first visit back to Hawaii since?

John Bernard Caulfield: No, I was here for our 50th anniversary.

Q: Now, the people that you met during the 50th, since you're a little more removed from the battle, what were your feelings about your new shipmates that you met at the 50th anniversary and who you've met in these past few days at the 60th?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. I'm sorry. I've a little hearing problem. So I did not fully understand your question.

Q: The people that you met at the 50th and that you're meeting again at the 60th, what are your feelings about these individuals who are your new shipmates?

John Bernard Caulfield: Uh.. I don't have anything p- particular feelings about it. We're just ten years older. And uh.. hopefully we will have a 70th.

Q: Well, we hope so. Well, I have no more questions. I would, first of all, like to thank you for sharing your experiences with us. And also I would like to thank you for serving this nation.

John Bernard Caulfield: Oh, thank you so much. Me too, captain. Been a long time <laughs>.

Q: Okay.

John Bernard Caulfield: <clears throat>

End of Tape John Bernard Caulfield